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SUBJECT: QINGHAI MUSLIMS, PART 1: GOVERNMENT CONTROLS,
THEOLOGICAL DIVERSITY AND GROWING WEALTH IN MUSLIM
COMMUNITIES

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Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Aubrey Carlson.
Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

11. (C) Government controls on Islam such as Hajj restrictions, training of imams and guidelines on mosque operations, persist in northwest China's Qinghai Province. During a September 14-19 visit, PolOff read a sign in one mosque in rural Haidong Prefecture that warns worshippers that religion must not be used "to interfere in Party leadership," "disrupt national unity," "obstruct social order," or to promote "pan-Islamism," "fundamentalism" or "extremism." Contacts say all imams in Qinghai must be trained in Xining's Government-run Institute of Islamic Texts. Despite such controls, Muslim places of worship remain a key pillar of local societies, bolstered by rising incomes and subsequent economic clout, which local Governments and NGOs seek to co-opt. In the capital of Xining, the population of Muslims continues to grow due to rural-urban migration. Local, private donations, including over RMB 7 million (USD 930,000) given by a Muslim-owned construction company, are funding the rebuilding of the Yudaiqiao Mosque. The mosque is entirely privately funded and operated. Theological diversity has also proliferated under Government management, as Qinghai's Muslims follow a variety of schools and practices within the Sunni sect such as Ikhwan and Qadim (the predominant school of Chinese Muslims outside Qinghai), Sufi (or "Menhuan") schools of Qadiriyyah and Jahriyyah, and even the reportedly banned Sala movement. End Summary.

Qinghai Diverse in People and Beliefs

12. (C) Xining Municipality and Haidong Prefecture, visited by PolOffs September 14-19, have a combined population that accounts for about 70 percent of Qinghai Province's 5.48 million people. Xining and Haidong hold a diverse ethnic and religious mix of

Han, Hui, Salar, Monguor (or "Tu" in Mandarin) and Tibetan. Xining's Muslims are predominantly of the Ikhwan movement (ref A), which, according to Hui Muslim contacts in NGOs and academia, seeks to restore their Islamic practices to a stricter brand more similar to Middle Eastern Islam. Most mosques visited by PolOffs in the rural mountains of Haidong were of either Ikhwan (often called "the new teachings" in Mandarin) or Qadim (the "old teachings"). Hui Muslims outside Qinghai predominantly adhere to Qadim. Contacts also noted mosques in Haidong Prefecture ascribing to the Sufi movements of Qadiriyyah and Jahriyyah, as well as some adherents to the Sala movement, which the Chinese Government has reportedly banned (refs B, C). All of these Islamic denominations and schools are of the Sunni sect.

The "Eight Forbiddens" and "Nine Musts"

¶3. (C) The "Xunhua County Islam Activities Management Methods," as posted in a small village mosque in Xunhua Salar Autonomous County, Haidong Prefecture, urged worshippers to "actively lead the co-adaptation of religion and socialism" as part of "building a socialist harmonious society." PolOffs noticed the same slogan at other mosques and in official local media. Additionally, Qinghai religious affairs officials publicize the "Eight Forbiddens" and "Nine Musts," which promise religious tolerance, but only for those with moderate beliefs who do not use their faith "to interfere in Party leadership or Socialist institutions," "disrupt national unity" or "obstruct social order." The guidance warns against the promotion of "pan-Islamism," "fundamentalism," "extremism" and "special feudalistic rights," as well as the leading of religious activities by unsanctioned or uncertified clerics and links with foreign religious organizations. "Foreign believers" may visit, but may not "meddle in internal religious affairs," lead religious activities or proselytize. The first of the "Nine Musts" declares that no "organization or individual may compel citizens to believe or not believe in religion," nor can citizens be discriminated against for their beliefs. The guidance also prohibits religious places of worship from publishing religious material, collecting donations, opening schools or even allowing elementary and junior high school-aged students to enter mosques. All imams in Qinghai are required to receive training at the Government-run Institute of Islamic Texts at Xining's Dongguan Great Mosque, according to Hui Muslims with whom PolOff spoke.

Religious Education Taking Place despite Ban

¶4. (C) Despite the strict tone of such postings, considerable religious freedom was evident throughout Xining City and Haidong Prefecture. Though in all parts of China children under the age of 18 are technically banned from receiving religious education, a third-grade teacher in Xunhua County said her students regularly go to the mosque during summer and winter vacations to learn about Islam. Primary school-age children in southern Xunhua County study the Qu'ran openly in a school funded by a local NGO. An imam in training, surnamed Ma, at the Government-operated Dongguan Great Mosque, said 10,000 worshippers visit each day, over 20,000 every Friday and 100,000 on major holidays. Calls to prayer ring out via loudspeakers across towns and villages in Hualong and Xunhua Counties of Haidong Prefecture. PolOff witnessed Hui teenagers chanting Qu'ran verses in a school at the Government-sanctioned Hongshuiquan Mosque in Hualong Hui Autonomous County as well as at an NGO-funded school for women in Xunhua Salar Autonomous County. At the women's school,

administrators told PolOff the students study the Qu'ran "for religious knowledge" and Mandarin for access to "knowledge of the outside world."

¶15. (C) Qinghai's Muslim population encompasses a wide variety of Islamic schools and practices. Minhe County, Haidong Prefecture, alone has mosques of the Ikhwan, Qadim and Sufi (or "Menhuan") schools of Qadiriyyah and Jahriyyah. Outside of mosques, PolOffs saw few religion-related propaganda posters. Government signs and billboards in Qinghai villages, as in most other parts of China, tout government policies regarding compulsory education, family-planning work and economic development. (Note: This is in contrast to Xinjiang, where slogans warning against "illegal religious activities" are common.)

Official Hajj Slots Still Scarce

¶16. (C) A Muslim Hui surnamed Du (strictly protect) from the Hualong County office of the Qinghai Hui and Salar Relief Association confirmed reports from Xinjiang that Government restrictions have tightened on Hajj journeys via third countries (ref D). According to Du, the officially sanctioned Hajj is controlled by the Central Government's State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA), which every year informs Qinghai's provincial Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) the number of slots available to Qinghai Muslims. From this provincial quota, the Qinghai RAB then allocates numbers for various prefectures and counties. Contacts in Beijing and Shaanxi Province have told PolOffs that the national and local Islamic Associations are charged with organizing Hajj journeys.

¶17. (C) Du said 371 of "about a thousand" Qinghai applicants were accepted for the Government-sponsored Hajj program in 2006. According to Du, qualified applicants have to be 45-70 years old, be in good health and pass a background investigation, which includes family background, employment and financial situation. Du reported that applicants who fail to win a spot remain on a waiting list. Most Hajj applicants wait about three years before getting a seat for a Hajj journey. Han Musa (strictly protect), a Hui Muslim graduate of a Malaysian university and member of a prominent Xining family, told PolOff separately he thinks some applicants are really rejected, not for a lack of space, but for poor health or having "extreme religious views."

Government Co-opting Mosques

¶18. (C) PolOff visited a Qinghai Hui and Salar Relief Association project site in Deyi Village, deep in the mountains of Hualong County. Gao Hongwei (strictly protect), a director of the Relief Association, told PolOff that the NGO must coordinate with the local mosque in order to run health and hygiene classes in a particular village. Mosques, Gao explained, remain the "center" of village communities in Qinghai. In Deyi, as in other rural communities visited, PolOff noticed that local governments post public notices outside mosques to insure they are widely read. The structure of local governments also reflects the power of the mosque. Deyi, for example, has two mayors, one to manage the village government, the other to oversee the mosque. At the provincial level, Qinghai's top leadership, generally non-Muslim Han Chinese, make public visits to mosques as a show of respect for Muslim leaders. For example, Gao commented favorably to PolOff on Qinghai Provincial Party Secretary Qiang Wei's June visit to the Dongguan Great Mosque. Gao noted that Qiang visited the Great Mosque shortly after arriving in Qinghai to "show his support" for

the Muslim community and in "recognition of Islam's importance" to the province's people.

Remittances Pour into Mosque Construction

¶ 9. (C) While still very poor compared to China's coastal provinces, Qinghai is enjoying strong economic growth. Qinghai's GDP grew 12.1 percent in 2006, with per capita GDP rising 11.3 percent to RMB 11,753 (USD 1,565). Muslim migrants working outside of Qinghai are helping to refurbish mosques back home with their remittances and donations. A resident in the small, underdeveloped village of Shanjiahuo, Hualong County, whose local mosque is undergoing a RMB 4 million reconstruction, told PolOff most of the funds have come from locals who migrated east to "do business" and "open restaurants." This includes the man's own son, who is running a restaurant in Tianjin. While some people said these contributions are signs of religious piety, others questioned the motives of these donors. Han Congdige (strictly protect), a Salar from Xunhua County who currently works in Beijing, said these individuals often use such gifts to build and protect personal influence within their hometowns. Both Gao and Zhu Yongzhong (strictly protect), a Monguor native of Haidong who now runs an NGO in Xining, complained that most of these remittances only support the imams and mosque construction, with little left for social welfare or community development programs.

New Wealth Means Less Dependence on Government

¶ 10. (C) Though Qinghai Muslims may argue the proper use of donations, our interlocutors agreed the increase in wealth means mosques have more independence from religious affairs authorities. According to Gao, local, private donations are funding the construction of a new Yudaiqiao Mosque, including over RMB 7 million (USD 930,000) donated by the privately-owned Muslim Construction and Engineering Company Ltd. Han Musa (mentioned above), who has completed the Hajj to Saudi Arabia and is nephew to the Muslim Construction and Engineering Company's founder, boasted that the new mosque will be completely privately operated. Han said the Dongguan Great Mosque, by contrast, is under the direct management of the Qinghai RAB. Contacts in Golmud City likewise said that growing wealth is enhancing the power of Muslims in Qinghai society (ref A). Ma Kuiming, a Hui studying the Qu'ran at Yijia Mosque in Gandu Town, Hualong County, said the number of mosques in Gandu has increased rapidly to at least 40, thanks to private money.

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